

DLA ASSESSMENT FOR THE NEW CENTURY

by Ken Rousseau

“The success of DLA has been and always will be its innovative, selfless, world-class workforce.”

- LTG Henry T. Glisson
DLA Director

As we move into the 21st Century, DLA will face many challenges. DLA's Strategic Plan 2000 defines the agency's goals, objectives, and values – and it helps each employee see where their work contributes to meeting agency goals.

As our most valuable resource, DLA's employees have a strong voice in defining what we hope to accomplish. You have also have a strong voice in crafting the initiatives and improvements needed to strengthen the Agency in the next few years and into the new millennia. Recent surveys have played a major part in obtaining employee feedback that will help to shape DLA's future. The 1999 DLA Employee Survey and the latest National Performance Review (NPR) Employee Survey have provided significant input to agency decision processes. This article provides a summary of the results of those surveys and provides insight on what DLA is doing in response.

Additional information on the MBNQA; PQA; NPR; and 1999 DLA NPR Survey, Employee Survey, and Strategic Plan can be found at:

MBNQA: <http://www.nist.gov>

PQA: <http://www.opm.gov/quality>

NPR: <http://www.npr.gov>

NPR 1999 Survey Report for DLA: <http://www.reinvent.dla.mil>

DLA 1999 Employee Survey:
http://www.reinvent.dla.mil/Employee_Results_htm.htm#EMPLOYEE

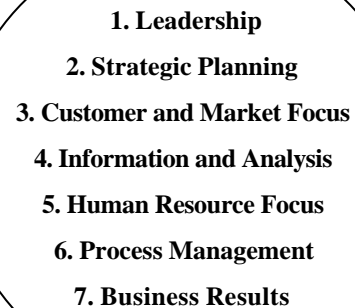
DLA Strategic Plan: <http://www.dla.mil/about.htm>

1999 DLA Employee Survey

In preparation for the Strategic Planning Summit in June 1999, DLA conducted a command-wide assessment. This assessment identified and evaluated strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and also included an employee survey. The survey questions were derived from the President's Quality Award Criteria, prescribed by Vice President Gore as a model for managing operations in Government agencies. Lieutenant General Henry T. Glisson, the DLA Director, personally endorsed the survey and pledged his commitment to DLA employees, and to "... *make DLA the organization all of our employees will be proud to work for and our customers will rely on for support*".

The President's Quality Award (PQA) criteria, the federal equivalent of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) used in the private sector, provides a framework for evaluating organizational excellence. The criteria includes seven key performance categories:

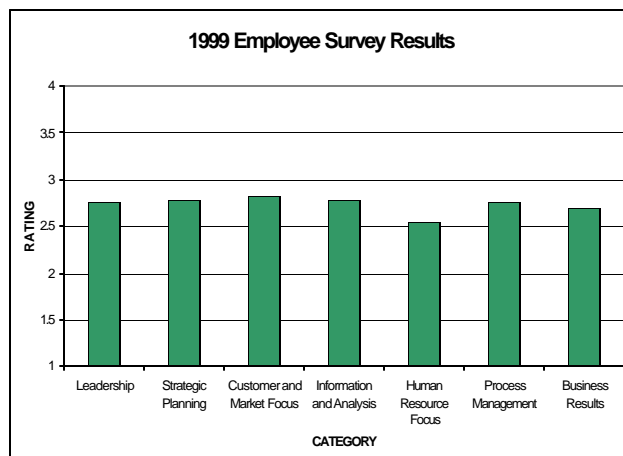


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- 1. Leadership**
 - 2. Strategic Planning**
 - 3. Customer and Market Focus**
 - 4. Information and Analysis**
 - 5. Human Resource Focus**
 - 6. Process Management**
 - 7. Business Results**

The Employee Survey consisted of 115 questions based on the PQA evaluation criteria in each of the seven categories. The survey questions were written to allow employees to rate specific aspects of DLA's organizational performance. A rating scale for responses was based on four possible answers, with values as follows: strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, agree = 3, and strongly agree = 4.

Survey question and answer design was based on the premise that high scores would indicate areas of strength, and that comparatively lower scores would indicate areas for improvement. DLA wants to keep doing the things that we are now doing well, and improve on those areas where our leaders, employees, or customers perceive shortcomings. DLA's Executive Team used the survey results as the basis for adding employee-oriented goals in Strategic Plan 2000, and have initiated efforts to tackle some of the areas for improvement at the operational level.

Some 4000 surveys were distributed throughout DLA and its field activities. More than 1900 employees responded. On a question-by-question basis, certain topics clearly dominated as agency strengths, while others pointed to areas that needed additional attention and improvement. The following chart provides a category-level overview of the survey results. See the accompanying sidebar for relative strengths and weaknesses by category.



The Employee Survey revealed strong DLA-wide attention to customers and customer requirements. Lower ratings were given to the focus on human resources. Questions in the DLA Employee Survey with noticeably low ratings were:

- My work unit has about the right amount of people to get the job done.
- My organization uses fair and equitable methods of providing individual rewards and recognition to its employees.
- Employees who take calculated risks (non-safety related) are rewarded for their behavior.
- My organization has a streamlined process for hiring employees.

1999 Employee Survey Highlights
Leadership Strength (Rating = 3.24): The timeliness of its products, processes, and services is important to DLA. Weakness (Rating = 2.22): I am adequately informed as to what is happening at DLA on a daily basis.
Strategic Planning Strength (Rating = 3.02): I can readily see how the work I do supports DLA's mission. Weakness (Rating = 2.60): DLA's Strategic Plan is a tool my work unit uses to guide and measure its activity.
Customer and Market Focus Strength (Rating = 3.14): Employees know who their customers are. Weakness (Rating = 2.43): DLA conducts customer surveys and provides results to all employees.
Information and Analysis Strength (Rating = 2.90): DLA uses available information and data to guide its strategic planning. Weakness (Rating = 2.65): Accurate and reliable information and data are readily available to my organization to regularly evaluate performance.
Human Resource Focus Strength (Rating = 3.11): My supervisor or leader allows me to get the job done the best way I know how. Weakness (Rating = 2.02): My organization has a streamlined process for hiring employees.
Process Management Strength (Rating = 3.02): I am aware of the key work processes in my work unit, their principle requirements, and their relationship to customers. Weakness (Rating = 2.61): Financial support systems and processes are effective in supporting my work unit.
Business Results Strength (Rating = 3.03): Customers are generally satisfied with the quality of DLA's products and services. Weakness (Rating = 2.32): Employees are highly satisfied with the Agency as a place to work in.
NOTE: Strengths and weaknesses are relative, and represent the highest and lowest ranked questions by category, regardless of numerical score.

Guided by the insights gained from the Employee Survey, the Executive Team incorporated improvement initiatives in DLA Strategic Plan 2000. Clearly one-third of the emphasis in DLA's Goals and Objectives is now focused on the workforce. DLA is committed to providing the necessary training and development opportunities, and the tools and resources to improve individual and organizational performance. DLA is committed to implement strategies that will attract, develop, and retain high quality employees. Quality of Life initiatives will be "demand driven" to ensure programs are targeted to meet the needs of the workforce. Strategic Goal 3, and its specific objectives defines the new approach:

DLA Strategic Goal 3: Ensure our workforce is enabled to deliver and sustain world class performance.

- Objective 3.1: Invest in the workforce to ensure we have the knowledge-based skills and tools to succeed.
- Objective 3.2: Implement a long-range strategy to sustain our workforce.
- Objective 3.3: Foster a positive work environment.

We understand the challenge. We appreciate the customer focus of our workforce, and your efforts in providing outstanding support and service to our customers: around-the-clock and around-the-world. We need to do better at providing the leadership, management, and support processes to sustain our great workforce.

Just as the new strategy was being captured for publication, some DLA employees also participated in the government-wide employee survey sponsored by the National Partnership for Reinventing Government.

National Partnership for Reinventing Government

For the last two years, DLA employees have participated in the annual employee survey conducted by the National Partnership for Reinventing Government (formerly the National Performance Review, or NPR). The NPR survey was designed to determine government employee reactions and perceptions regarding the extent of 'reinvention' activities and their impact on improving internal operations. The survey contained 32 questions relating to the four basic principles of reinvention:

- Putting customers first
- Cutting red tape
- Empowering employees to get results
- Cutting back to basics

This survey instrument contains four parts with questions that focus on: (1) how 'my' organization operates, (2) the 'extent' of reinvention in my organization, (3) 'my' job satisfaction, and (4) 'goodness' ratings for 'my' supervisor and the quality of work performed by 'my' work group.

Who Said It?

"We need a federal government that delivers more for less. We need a federal government that treats its taxpayers as if they were customers and treats taxpayer dollars with respect for the sweat and sacrifice that earned them."

[The answer to this question appears at the end of this article]

The overall results from the NPR survey indicated that DLA has been very successful in several areas. In terms of job satisfaction, DLA had higher favorable responses than the Government-wide average and the three largest military departments. DLA also scored high on the topic of reinvention. Our employees rated the Agency's progress as significantly more favorable than the Government-wide average (45% versus 35%, respectively). Additional strengths, using the precise wording of the questions in the survey, include:

- Service goals are aimed at meeting customer expectations.
- Management and the unions work cooperatively.
- Employees are rewarded for teamwork.
- Differences are respected and valued.

DLA employees were least satisfied with specific support functions, awards, and performance management. The following specific questions received low ratings:

- Recognition and rewards are based on merit.
- Creativity and innovation are rewarded.
- Corrective actions are taken when employees do not meet performance standards.
- Are you clear about how "good performance" is defined in your organization?
- Has your organization implemented simplified travel regulations?
- Has your organization streamlined the process for hiring employees?
- Is the use of Plain Language writing being emphasized in your workplace?
- Employees receive the training they need to perform their jobs.

DLA's results compared very favorably with the aggregate results from all of the other government agencies taking the NPR surveys.

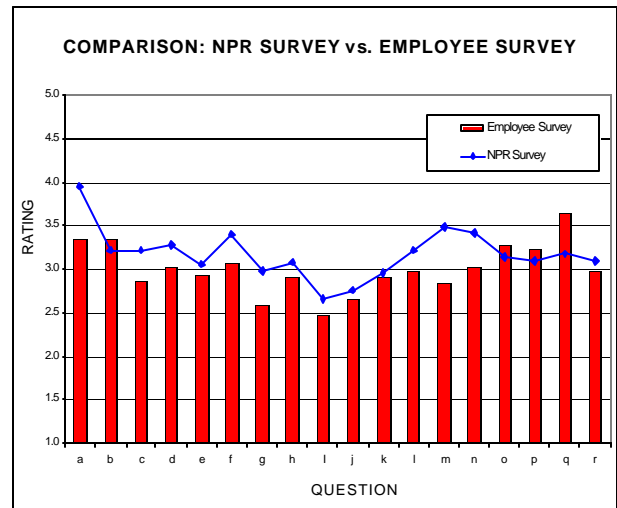
R. J. Wrigley was on a plane once and the man seated next to him asked Wrigley why he continued to advertise so widely when his company was already the most successful maker and distributor of chewing gum in the world.

"For the same reason that the pilot of this airplane keeps the engines running after we are already in the air," replied Wrigley.

Comparison: 1999 Employee Survey and the NPR

The PQA Employee Survey and the NPR Survey share common themes and questions in the area of organizational perceptions. Of the 21 NPR questions that delve into organizational performance, 18 are closely related to one or more of the questions found in the DLA Employee Survey. These questions are comparable because they all use a similar multi-level “agreement” scale to evaluate the responses. A comparison of the surveys and their results are presented in the following charts:

1999 Employee & NPR Surveys: Compatible Questions	
a.	There are service goals aimed at meeting customer expectations.
b.	There are well-defined systems for linking customers’ feedback and complaints to employees who can act on the information.
c.	Managers communicate the organization’s mission, vision, and values.
d.	My immediate supervisor has organized our work group effectively to get the work done.
e.	At the place I work, my opinions seem to count.
f.	A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in my immediate work unit.
g.	Employees are rewarded for working together in teams.
h.	Employees in different work units participate in cross-functional teams to accomplish work objectives.
i.	Recognition and rewards are based on merit.
j.	Creativity and innovation are rewarded.
k.	Employees receive training and guidance in providing high-quality customer service.
l.	Employees receive the training they need to perform their jobs.
m.	Differences among individuals are respected and valued.
n.	Supervisors/team leaders understand and support employees’ family/personal life responsibilities.
o.	My organization has made reinvention a priority.
p.	In the past 2 years, the productivity of my work unit has improved.
q.	In the past 2 years, I have been given more flexibility in how I accomplish my work.
r.	Management and the union(s) work cooperatively on mutual problems.



In making this comparison, several factors are recognized. First, the wording of the questions was not precisely the same in both surveys. Thus, this is a comparison of **similar**, not identical, topics. Second, there was a **gap** of several months between the timing of the two surveys. Perceptions change over time, and survey responses can be greatly affected by recent events.

Nevertheless, we can make the following general observations:

- The overall results are very similar – with few exceptions; both surveys show a consistent pattern.
- NPR Survey results (Fall 1999) suggest improvements over the DLA Employee Survey results (Spring 1999) (see graph for specific correlations).
- Persistent and dedicated management effort is needed to understand the reasons behind the problems made visible in the surveys, identify the policy or practices fostering employee dissatisfaction, make the necessary changes, and, as a result of these actions, drive the ratings upward.

The consistency between the two surveys reinforces the selection of areas needing improvement. In order of importance, the two primary areas are:

- Rewards and Recognition
 - ➔ Based on merit
 - ➔ For teamwork
 - ➔ For creativity and innovation
- Communications by managers of the organization's
 - ➔ Mission
 - ➔ Vision
 - ➔ Values
 - ➔ Policies, procedures, and corporate information

DLA Improvement Plan - Actions and Initiatives

The Employee Survey, as validated by the NPR Survey, has served as a launching point for DLA's Strategy. Strategic Goal 3 was specifically designed to focus efforts inward toward workforce development and sustainment. DLA is answering the challenge. Actions to address and resolve employee concerns are underway. Here are few highlights from the DLA improvement plan submitted to the NPR.

- A series of employee focus groups will be organized during 2000 to better identify for DLA management the institutional processes that affect employee satisfaction, and to develop potential actions for changes to DLA policies or practices (particularly those which have had a negative impact on employee satisfaction). The Executive Director of DLA, Mr. Gary Thurber, has been designated by the Director as the executive assigned responsibility for the success of this process.
- DLA has been in negotiations with AFGE Council 169 on the agency performance management regulations. These regulations currently emphasize supervisory responsibility to involve employees in the development of performance plans and communicate, at least twice a year, to employees their performance in meeting the standards.
- Agency awards program policy will be reviewed during 2000. DLA regulations were revised in 1998 and will be updated during 2000 to reflect changes in department policy. As an interim measure, the limit on the amount of cash awards allowable for on-the-spot awards was recently increased.
- DLA continues to review performance management-related employee concerns and practices. The review considers linkage of organizational objectives to performance plans, the state of performance standards and the effectiveness of the processes for communicating expectations and providing feedback to employees, the performance basis for awards, and opportunities for the application of team evaluation techniques. Review results are used to determine if program or policy changes are required.

LTG Glisson's endorsement to the DLA Quality of Life Plan says it all ...

"The Defense Logistics Agency's most important resource is its employees ...we pledge to respond to employee needs by making work and living conditions as functional, comfortable, and attractive as possible by creating an environment that fosters professional growth and facilitates the change necessary to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Through our many programs and services, as well as through embracing the Agency ethos and values, we strive to continually enhance the quality of life of every Team DLA member."

Surveys - The Bottom Line

In an agency as large as DLA, surveys are an important mechanism to obtain feedback on a large-scale basis for the workforce. It allows everyone to be heard on an equal level, from the senior executives in the "board room," to the forklift operator in the warehouse. We want you all to know that we appreciate the time and effort that it takes to complete these surveys when they come around, and we appreciate the widespread participation. We also want you to know that your surveys do not get put into some statistical reports and just filed away -- we want to **share** their results with you in articles such as this, and more importantly, DLA's senior leadership intends to **act** on your input. You can read their commitments in the Agency Improvement Plan at <http://www.dla.mil/strategic/survey/htm>.

Answer to question on page **X**: Vice President Al Gore, from the Gore Report on Reinventing Government, a report of the National Performance Review, Sep 7, 1993.

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